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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MEXICO 003175

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: MEXICO: OHCHR REPORT HIGHLIGHTS HUMAN RIGHTS'  
CHALLENGE

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Gustavo Delgado.  
Reason: 1.4 (b),(d).

11. (C) Summary: The UN's High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) released a report on October 13 that expressed serious concerns about threats faced by human rights activists in the country. The report speaks to 128 cases of aggression against human rights defenders, including ten homicides. The report comes at a time when Mexico is under increased scrutiny for its human rights record and the GOM's reaction was a familiar mix of obfuscation and cooperation that reinforces our plans for a forceful and active approach to addressing the human rights problem here. End Summary.

12. (U) The UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Mexico released a report October 13 in which it documented 128 aggressions against human rights activists that occurred between January 2006 and August 2009, including ten murders and three kidnappings. According to the 50-page report, "Defending Human Rights: Caught Between Commitment and Risk," threats represent 27 percent of the cases, criminal prosecution of human rights promoters accounts for another 20 percent, harassment for 17 percent, and arbitrary interference, such as information theft and office raids, accounts for ten percent. The report maintains that the government has not addressed 98.5 percent of the cases documented in the report. It notes 36 of the alleged victims were women. The largest number of incidents occurred in Mexico City, the states of Chihuahua and Jalisco, and the southern states of Oaxaca, Guerrero and Chiapas. The report includes recommendations on ways to address some of the problems facing human rights activists including: a national mechanism to protect human rights defenders, special programs for activists who are threatened, and an educational campaign to raise awareness of the work they do.

13. (SBU) To compile the report, OHCHR staff visited 10 of Mexico's 32 states and interviewed and sent questionnaires to NGOs, human rights defenders, victims of aggression, local authorities, journalists, and state commissions on human rights. Alberto Brunori, the head of the OHCHR's Office in Mexico, took pains not to draw any larger conclusions from the report that would be critical of the government, but clearly the report suggests the lack of an integrated policy to reduce and eliminate risks to human rights activists. "Commitment and risk, this defines the situation human rights defenders work in," he said. Although in most cases the identity of the perpetrators is unknown, the report blames local authorities and organized crime for a large proportion of the cases. The response of the Mexican state to the problems facing human rights activists in Mexico has been

uneven, especially at the local level, Brunori said.

¶4. (C) Brunori told Poloffs privately afterwards (strictly protect) that the Secretariat of Government (Secretaria de Gobernacion - SEGOB) had finally agreed to meet with him, after the report's public launch, to discuss the report and its recommendations. Prior to that, SEGOB had been unwilling to engage and the Mexican Foreign Ministry (SRE) had worked back channels in Geneva and New York to try to kill the report. Brunori said that he had been careful in preparing the report, and had provided the Mexican government with a draft two months before the presentation to allow time for an official response. Prior to making the report public, he had not received any reaction from the government in Mexico, but had been told by his office in Geneva and by colleagues in New York that Mexico had complained, both to the Commissioner's and to the Secretary-General's office. Brunori noted that the SRE and the Attorney General's office (PGR) had sent a representative to the event launching the report, but had not asked to speak. He was encouraged that SEGOB was willing to engage on the recommendations and hopeful that some of them would be implemented.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: The OHCHR operates in Mexico on the basis of a complicated partnership agreement with the GOM that appears to be unevenly implemented. The GOM's reaction to the OHCHR report is a further reflection of the often contradictory way in which Mexico tends to mix both cooperation and foot-dragging in its response to its human rights problem. Its National Commission on Human Rights, unparalleled across the continent for its defense of human

MEXICO 00003175 002 OF 002

rights, also tends to reflect this dichotomy -- sometimes working as a forceful advocate, in other cases overly accommodating. The OHCHR report touches on one of the more frequent complaints we hear from the human rights community working in Mexico. When the Ambassador met with leading Human Rights NGOs shortly after his arrival and suggested a working dialogue on a set of agreed priority areas, complaints about harassment and intimidation of the human rights community topped the list. Post will be working with the NGO community, OHCHR and ICRC, and with the government on ways to support a zero-tolerance policy for any threats or intimidation in response to human rights allegations. More details to follow in septel. End Comment.

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